



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND
YOUNG PEOPLE**

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2005-2006)

Members:

**MS M PORTER (The Chair)
MR M GENTLEMAN (The Deputy Chair)
MRS V DUNNE**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2006

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms S Lilburn (Ph: 6205 0490)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

APPEARANCES

Department of Education and Training	1
---	----------

The committee met at 9.29 am.

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Industrial Relations

Department of Education and Training

Bruniges, Dr Michele, Chief Executive

Davy, Ms Janet, Deputy Chief Executive

Curry, Mr Craig, Executive Director

Strauch, Ms Helen, Director, Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting

Hare, Mr John, Director, Governance, Regulation and Risk

Donnelly, Mr Rob, Director, Finance and Facilities

Houghton, Ms Anne, Director, Training and Tertiary Education

Melsom, Ms Kathy, Director, Student Services

Chandler, Mr Wayne, Director, Schools Northern

Howard, Ms Joanne, Director, Schools Central

Harris, Ms Carol, Director, Schools Southern

Wilks, Ms Trish, Director, Curriculum Support and Professional Learning

Bateman, Mr Michael, Director, Human Resources

THE CHAIR: Good morning, minister, Dr Bruniges and officials. I will read the card before we get started. The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings.

Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attached to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request, the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly, I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing. Did you all understand that?

WITNESSES: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Please turn mobile phones off. We all know that. I do not have mine, so mine will not ring today. Would you introduce yourself and say your position when you first speak. Thank you very much, minister, for appearing before us this morning, and all your officials. Did you want to make an opening statement?

Mr Barr: Yes, if I could. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the 2005-2006 annual report for the Department of Education and Training. Whilst I have only been Minister for Education and Training since April of this year—only a quarter of the period covered by the report—I am very appreciative of the many achievements by the department over the entire annual report period.

Investing in education is a priority for this government, to ensure that it continues to deliver outstanding educational outcomes to young people and families in the ACT. The government recognises that education is the best means of securing our children's future and that of the ACT community. ACT government schools have an excellent record of achievement. ACT students consistently achieve outstanding results in national and international assessments. For example, our students remain among the highest performers in Australia in literacy and numeracy. These outstanding results are again demonstrated in this annual report.

The schools excellence framework, introduced in 2003, has been embedded in our schools. The framework is challenging school principals to aim for excellence across four domains of schooling including teaching and learning, leadership and management, community involvement, and student environment. Other highlights from the 2005-2006 annual report include the commissioning of the emerging technologies report to help guide departmental thinking on ICT. The government has backed this by announcing a \$20 million smart school, smart students initiative.

We are undertaking ecologically sustainable developments such as the Harrison school, which has design features addressing sustainability issues, including natural ventilation in all buildings; night cooling and purging by utilising differences in temperature; individual buildings containing their own gas-fired boiler; high thermal mass construction to be used to maximise the heat bank characteristics of the buildings; optimisation of daylight to reduce the need for artificial light; rainwater collection, stored in large underground water storage tanks, to provide water reuse for toilet flushing, plant and garden bed irrigation and for cleaning the paved area; low maintenance, environmentally friendly materials to be used in construction; and a building management system to provide intelligent building controls for lighting, heating and ventilation.

The Birrigai Outdoor School, which was completed in May 2006, also utilises design to address sustainability issues. In addition, we have the sustainable schools pilot program, in which 13 government schools are participating. This has begun to coordinate each school's approach to environmental sustainability through the establishment of a school environmental management plan.

The department has also made progress on curriculum reform, extending the support for student pathways planning, including provision for students seeking vocational qualifications, and continuing support for school leadership development. I would also like to highlight the establishment of the ANU college, which has allowed high-achieving college students to take up study at the ANU campus—not to mention, of course, that in this annual reporting period the department has received unqualified audit reports on their financial report and their statement of performance from the

Auditor-General.

I hope this morning's hearings are used by the committee to look back and discuss the many educational achievements during the reporting period. As we move from this reporting period to the current financial year, we are seeking to build on those achievements through a significant investment in ACT government schools.

We have the opportunity to make changes that will significantly benefit our children over the coming decades. The excellent performance of the department in 2005-06, detailed in this annual report, lays a strong foundation for future work as we continue to build on a world-class education and training system in the ACT. I am happy to take questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Barr. I thought I might begin, then obviously go to my colleagues. To pick up on a couple of things you mentioned in your introductory remarks, I was particularly interested to know a little bit more about the school excellence framework. It mentions it as an initiative here on page 8 of the report. I was wondering if you could tell us a bit more about that one and, after that, go on and give us more detail about the emerging technologies report and how that links into the additional ICT that you are planning to roll out.

Mr Barr: The schools excellence initiative is the framework for achieving high standards in student learning, innovation and best practice in ACT government schools. That was introduced back in the 2003-04 budget through a \$450,000 budget initiative that runs until 2006-07. The initiative supports schools to review and assess their performance, to build on existing good practices and to instigate improvements, with a focus on enhancing student achievement and learning. A major component of schools excellence involves a three-year school review and development cycle, focusing on continuing improvement in schools. This initiative has seen the shortening of previous cycles from five to three years, and has also introduced external validation.

I might at this point throw it to my chief executive to give some further detail around each year of the validation process. I think it is important that the committee hear a little more about exactly how this initiative is working.

Dr Bruniges: In terms of the school excellence proposal and the document that runs with it as our excellence framework, we are gradually seeing a great deal of interest from across the country from a number of different jurisdictions in the way in which we are putting in place a three-year process. In the first year of the cycle, school communities work on collecting data as a way of looking at a self-reflection on a number of different criteria. Those criteria include learning and teaching, leadership and management, community involvement, and student environment.

As part of that cycle, all of that information is analysed and looked at. We have an external validator who is in the process this year of looking at the first wave of that data and going through processes of validating in the schools that have been involved. Not all schools are involved each year. We make sure that schools are rotated. So once every three years each school has a chance to look at that.

Once we collect all of the data and it is analysed, we use that as the main strategic driver to inform school planning. It is a critical process to close that loop, to look at the evidence that is collected in each of those four domains I have mentioned, to collect the evidence, and to have that externally verified and validated by an external party and a panel. That will include parents and someone from outside the system. We then take the recommendations from those reports, so schools are enabled to develop a very focused strategic plan based on an evidence approach.

We are really pleased to date with the way in which that initiative has been travelling. As I said our, external validator from South Australia is about to couple the first series of reports together. From our evaluation to date—and we will have a formal report on that as we go towards the end of this year—it seems to be working well. It is a very powerful tool for informing all of those domains.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Barr: To pick up on your second question in relation to emerging technologies in schools, I think that is undoubtedly an area where the ACT can lead the nation, and in fact lead the world. We are seeing in our schools a significant change in the way technology is utilised. I think back to my own time in the ACT school system and compare that with more recent visits to schools over the last three or four months. There is a vast gulf between what those of us who were at school in the 1980s experienced and what is on offer in terms of technology in our schools now.

The department commissioned education.au in August 2005 to undertake a consultancy to report on emerging technologies in our schools that directly relate to the delivery and enhancement of teaching and learning in preschool, school and the VET sectors. The underlying message was that we are now dealing with—I think the term is—digital natives.

The old joke used to be that the only person in the house who could program the VCR was the seven-year-old. I think it is fairly clear, when looking at our school systems now, that there are four and five-year-olds who are more literate in ICT than many of their parents.

What we need to do, as an education system, is to be able to respond to that change; provide the emerging technology; and to provide students, wherever they are in the ACT education system, with access to that high-quality ICT. That is one of the key reasons why we have sought to invest record amounts into information and communication technology.

When you look at the natural advantages the ACT has as a city-state, we have the potential to have optical fibre broadband access for every school. That is certainly something the Queensland and Western Australian education ministers would not be able to deliver, given the vast distances in those jurisdictions. This is a natural advantage for the ACT. I think we should lead the nation, and not only the nation but also the world, in ICT provision. But that obviously requires a significant investment over the years ahead.

We have had a period, I believe, of quite significant investment in the past, but we

need to build on that. I see it as a great opportunity over the next four years to roll out a fantastic program to look to build on options such as myclasses.

When visiting Duffy primary school last week, I got to see some of the students participating in the mathletes program, competing against students from all over Australia and New Zealand. I saw the level of engagement with mathematics and their excitement. There were tons of kids crowded around these computers, actually engaging in and being thrilled by this contest. That was a level of excitement about mathematics that I do not recall from my days at school.

I think we are seeing through the roll-out of these programs a great leap forward for education. It also provides an opportunity for a small jurisdiction like the ACT, through its involvement in some of the leading ICT education providers, to access high-quality curriculums and subject matter in a relatively inexpensive way. We contribute on a per capita basis to many of these companies and get a greater return, I believe, for our investment.

Dr Bruniges: I refer to the expanding curriculum resources that are put through the Curriculum Corporation. That is the ministerial company which has been working on the development of digital learning objects. We now have Australia-wide about 5,000, and that is quickly to expand. It will mean that each one of our schools is able to tap into that resource. It will be a wonderful resource in terms of learning.

There have been studies here in Australia. Peter Freebody has done a study about students who access learning objects via that form of technology. In terms of the overall improvement in learning outcomes, we are actually starting to lead internationally from the learning objects field. By increasing that bandwidth even further, it provides a wonderful opportunity.

MRS DUNNE: For a non-digital native, Dr Bruniges, could you say what you mean by “learning objects”?

Dr Bruniges: Yes, sure.

MRS DUNNE: They are not cuisenaire rods, obviously.

Dr Bruniges: No, they are not, but they certainly are a repository of resources. It might be film archive or a film clip that is taken from history—from World War I or World War II. It may be something from the science field that is captured on film as a learning object. It can be film clips to things that teachers make and generate, in terms of digital content, that students can interact with directly.

You can watch the film clip and hook onto the internet. You are able to download, say, a Churchill speech. You are able to look at that and there will be an activity that has been designed to follow on from that stimulus. There are wonderful clips from the Australian Film Archive. There are things that teachers have generated, in terms of designing fraction work, at one level, that students can directly interact with in that format. It is a very broad source of material.

THE CHAIR: You talked about children or young people gathering around

computers. I want to know if there will be enough computers. That is worrying me. Obviously it is a very individual activity in many ways. Do you perceive that we are going to have enough resources to be able to provide enough computers?

Mr Barr: It is always a challenge to ensure that we have enough. It depends. It varies from school to school at the moment. There are some that are very well resourced and others that could do with a little bit of additional assistance. That will certainly feature as part of that roll-out of technology.

That said, at Duffy primary there were plenty of computers; it was just that there was a degree of excitement about one of the high-performing students who was doing very well against a Western Australian student in this particular contest at the time I was visiting. Nonetheless, I think that is a fair point. It a clear issue, given the number of school sites that we are operating off at the moment, that we are not able to provide the level of technology across all of those sites at the level that we would like.

DR FOSKEY: I was wondering who is going to provide the expert technological back-up for this system. Is it going to be a specialist area in the department, or is the new shared services area through INTACT meant to back it up? It seems to me that that would be crucial to its success.

Mr Barr: Indeed. Yes, there will be an education IT unit within the shared services component. I will get Dr Bruniges to give you some more detail on that.

Dr Bruniges: One of the fortunate things I found when I moved to the jurisdiction was that we had technical advisers in each of our schools to support the technical load that needs to happen with having a strong IT background. We have certainly got a unit that we have been working in—our information management branch. It will become part of the shared services model. We will be driving policy and the initiatives that we want in our schools via that mechanism, via shared services. We do not expect that to change. The fact that we have technical support for each of our schools, so that load is not carried by the teaching work force, has certainly been welcomed in schools, from what I have heard since my arrival here.

DR FOSKEY: One thing I noted from the report is that there is actually, it seems to me, a level of concern.

Mr Barr: Which page are you referring to?

DR FOSKEY: I will quote from page 16, the bottom of the second paragraph, last sentence. It says that the successful implementation of a shared services department will also provide those challenges and opportunities. While you have mentioned an opportunity there, I can see a degree of trepidation as well as excitement about the shared services. I wonder if you could expand on that.

Dr Bruniges: Yes, certainly. In terms of some of the challenges, the dynamic rate at which information technology is changing is certainly a challenge faced by this jurisdiction, as it is by many. Making sure that we are at the cutting edge of research about what is actually happening with technology, both within the department and how we convey those needs to the shared services, to make sure that we deliver in

schools, I see as a particular challenge. It is one where we have to internally look within the department to make sure we have the appropriate mechanisms to ensure that we are driving the policy and that we are on top of the latest research as a challenge.

That is a change. Change always brings some challenges. I think not to admit that there are challenges in IT—even in private enterprise as well as the public sector—would not be doing the right thing. Those challenges come along with the rate of change in technology—looking at interactive whiteboards, looking at personal devices that students are using, making sure our policies are there, and making sure that we make best use for students with autism.

There is some great work to be done in terms of students with disabilities and how IT might support students with disabilities. I do not think we are quite there yet in terms of gaining as much as we can for students with particular special needs. I think they present some challenges for the department.

DR FOSKEY: What about cultural challenges? The kind of culture of an IT department and the kind of culture of an education department seem to be really different. Getting that communication, making shared services respond to what you want, rather than fitting in with what is easier for them—I see those as quite major challenges.

Dr Bruniges: I think you need both. I think you need an educational use of what is actually happening and driving the policy, and then underpinned by the IT technical support. We do not expect, as in any other profession, teachers to have a broad range of skills, so we have to use technical expertise. We have to ensure that we are driving the policy, that we are not being driven by the technology backwards and that education is driving the policy position in terms of the shared services model.

MRS DUNNE: My questions are on the subject but are also slightly tangential as a parent. Much of the curriculum material you see available to children on computers and through electronic whiteboards when you visit schools—the stuff you described before, Dr Bruniges—is pretty whiz-bang. How is the school addressing the problem that I see as a parent, which is that a child comes home with an assignment and their first recourse is to say, “I will look it up on the internet”?

The internet is not what they are seeing at school. They are seeing a whole lot of materials which are vetted, refereed et cetera. What mechanisms are there, even at a very young age, to tell and instil in a student that what they might find on the internet may not necessarily be true and does not have the same security about it. I mean security in terms of the quality of the input, the quality of the material that is there. There are a whole lot of freaks on the internet. You can type in on any subject and you will have all these people whose favourite subject is the crusades or something like that, just as an example.

How do you teach children at a young age, and all the way through, to discriminate between what is quality and what is not quality when they are doing research beyond the stuff that is provided by the school, beyond what might be called the intranet material, when they are out there on the world wide web? What sorts of mechanisms

are there? Is there an encouragement to say, “Why don’t you look it up in a book first?” Sorry; I am old-fashioned.

Mr Barr: Yes. I have some sympathy with that position, inasmuch as a lot of what you read on the internet is not necessarily stuff that would stand up to some critical analysis. I will get Dr Bruniges to answer the detail of that.

Dr Bruniges: I think that is a really critical point that you have raised, Mrs Dunne, about making sure that in our schools we have that secure environment where we have those refereed resources, that they are clearly linked to the curriculum, that they are high quality, and not only that but also a program where teachers are using critical thinking skills, teaching students to evaluate as they go. It is the same, of course. Some books are going to be a better source and qualified source than you are ever going to find on the internet. Encouraging a balanced approach I think is one of the challenges with ICT and what students access within the school environment in terms of all of that curriculum and books.

MRS DUNNE: No. My question is actually that the schools are somewhat cosseted because there is a lot of material at their disposal. If students have a self-directed study project which they have to do at home or with a couple of mates, or something like that, what sorts of skills are we instilling to have that critical approach that, when you do your Google search, the first thing that comes up may not be the best thing? I spend my time doing that.

Mr Barr: Google searching?

MRS DUNNE: No—instilling that the first thing you find may not be the answer to your question. What sorts of skills do you give to students to evaluate what they find on the internet? What sorts of tests are you giving them? Do you encourage them to find out something about the author; is the author credible or are they somebody who has a pet subject?

Dr Bruniges: I think a combination. Every teacher at different levels will be using different examples, but making sure students are critically thinking; that we give them exercises where we say, “This is clearly a case of not being correct and this is”; teaching them through modelling techniques about the difference; appropriate use of ICT; and inquiring as to how you actually get a valid inquiry. It is all of those research skills that they go through.

If you have a student assignment and their immediate action is to go home to the internet, I would hope that parents too are encouraging appropriate use. There has to be a partnership model, I think, between the school and home. We had one example where we looked at myclasses as a mechanism which we used. We worked with in-servicing the P&C on the use of myclasses to build up parents’ awareness of those kinds of skills too.

Each teacher should take that in as part of their daily practice. The internet is one source and the classroom is another. Teachers need to make that on-balance judgment about appropriate use and when. Certainly we have a huge responsibility in the school setting for looking at the appropriate use of the internet, literature and teaching

students the importance of critically assessing those things through a range of practices.

MRS DUNNE: A related issue—and this is something that it seems to me needs to start from an early age that we all have to be vigilant about—is the habits that will lead to plagiarism. I think when you are six or seven it is not plagiarism; you just do not know any better. It seems to me that it becomes so much easier when you can click and point and move data from one document to another. What safeguards do we have to build up in children the appropriate use, ensure that the thing they produce is in fact their work, and to build up that ethic from a very early age? It has to happen so much earlier.

Dr Bruniges: Yes. Ethics is a really strong partner. I failed to mention it before. The ethical use of material and the fact that you acknowledge other people's work is a strong part of it. In fact, if you look at our new curriculum renewal, the ethical use of inquiry and how we go about that has been embedded within the new curriculum. We also have it right up the other end at the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies in terms of plagiarism. Material is issued to students on showing what is and what is not.

Like you say, it is not just the senior years. We have to start that from a very young age to encourage the notion of what is owned; how you can bend, twist and write someone else's words; and when you acknowledge that and when you do not. I think one of the best models is working through actual examples with students. You can be very explicit in terms of what matters and when people actually start to paraphrase, as opposed to plagiarise, and when it is appropriate to give the appropriate acknowledgment of source. Those practices should be right from the beginning.

MRS DUNNE: And they are right from the beginning?

Dr Bruniges: I would have to say yes, we are starting to get there, with the dynamic range of the internet and what students have access to. We work very hard, and I think teachers work very hard, to instil that. It is a growing issue, particularly when you have high-stakes assessments. We have probably seen the iceberg unfold in the senior secondary years, but we should start much earlier in terms of the curriculum and examples and sharing practice in that area. I am quite confident that our teachers embed that practice not only to do with ICT but also day-to-day assignment work.

Mr Barr: There have been a couple of examples, more at a university level, where some students have perhaps overlooked the fact that their lecturer or their tutor might also be able to Google the subject and find exactly where material has been sourced from. I think that is a very valid point to raise overall. It is a culture that we need to embed as the internet becomes the primary source of research for so many students.

MRS DUNNE: It seems to me that it is physically harder to copy out of a book.

Dr Bruniges: It is more time consuming, you think?

MRS DUNNE: More time consuming, yes.

Mr Barr: Yes, cutting and pasting.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, Dr Bruniges has touched on curriculum renewal. If you go to page 13, at the top of the page there is a column on that. The report mentions the renewal task force. Can you tell us where we are up to with the renewal process—and where to from here?

Mr Barr: To give some background, the curriculum framework has been developed through a process of extensive community consultation, beginning in 2004, and has involved more than 300 teachers and academics. We are moving towards an implementation in 2008.

I had the opportunity to launch the curriculum framework trial draft, *Every chance to learn*, in July this year. The framework, as Mrs Dunne has identified, contains 26 essential learning achievements that specify what students in all ACT government and non-government schools from preschool to year 10 need to know, need to understand, need to value and need to be able to do.

The essential learning achievements encompass eight key learning areas and the interrelationships between those key learning areas. They are the foundation for the schools to plan their own curriculums. The essential learning achievements contain content in four bands of development which fully implement the national statements of learning for English, mathematics, science, civics and citizenship, and information and communication technology. It is important to acknowledge here that the ACT is the first jurisdiction to encompass these nationally agreed statements of learning. Again we are leading the nation. We are, of course, in the trial phase of this process. The framework has been distributed to all teachers in government and non-government schools. I am advised that professional learning support is being provided to schools.

That commenced with a two-day conference that I attended at Parliament House in July. That involved 240 executive members from all ACT preschools, primary schools and high schools. This phase also includes an external validation study, school trial and further community consultation. This will inform the work to prepare the release of a completed curriculum framework for 2007.

I understand 38 government and non-government schools have expressed interest in participating in the trial for next year, and 22 have been selected. The trial commenced in October this year, with an initial briefing meeting for principals, contact teachers and supporting curriculum officers. The curriculum officers will work with these schools for up to three hours a week. The trial will conclude in July 2007, with trialling schools then providing documentation on the processes they have used. I am also advised that there will be an online feedback instrument for teachers, parents, students and community members, that this has been developed as part of the consultation process and that will be on the department's website from November this year, which we are now in, until April 2007.

MR GENTLEMAN: You touched there on the number of schools that are going to be in the trial. You said 28 schools.

Mr Barr: No, 22.

MR GENTLEMAN: Twenty-two—my apologies. There are 38 on the list and 22 in the trial. How many non-government schools will be in that?

Mr Barr: That is a good question, I will get Janet Davy to answer it.

Ms Davy: Of the 22, there is a mix of government and non-government. The exact details we would have to take on notice, but there is a balance across primary schools, high schools and colleges, and there is a balance across different types of schools. We have included special education schools, and we have tried to include schools that are going to work as clusters, to look at English and primary subject-specific scope and sequence charts. We have tried to get a mix across all schools.

MRS DUNNE: Can we have that list?

Ms Davy: Yes.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, you also mentioned civics. This committee has recently been inquiring into the voting age. In the submissions to the committee, there was a lot of discussion about the improvement of the teaching of civics in schools. I wonder if you could give us a little more detail about the civics education.

Mr Barr: Certainly. I fully endorse the work of the committee in terms of seeking to improve civics education in our schools. I think we can all point to experiences we have had as members of parliament in having to explain even some of the more basic nature of our democratic system to some students who you would think would have a better understanding of how a democracy works.

I am taking a particularly keen interest in this area. I think it is of particular importance, in the context of the ACT, that our students have a better understanding of the unique nature of governance in this territory and that so much of the national focus is on three tiers of government. We need to ensure that students in the ACT have a better understanding of the unique role of the Assembly in providing both state and local government functions.

There are also important issues around the nature of our electoral system that are confusing to many adults. Clearly we have an opportunity through our education system to improve the understanding of how our local democracy works. That is a key area of attention that I think the new curriculum framework is focusing on.

I will get Janet Davy to give you a bit more detail around that and also some of the national learning outcomes that we are seeking to incorporate into that. I am very conscious that we do not lose focus of the uniqueness of the ACT system in seeking to incorporate the national requirements that the commonwealth government has.

Ms Davy: In the new curriculum framework we have quite a number of the 26 essential learning achievements, with a focus in the civics-citizenship area. We have one where students understand about Australia and Australians, which will pick up the historical notion of our move from Federation. We have one that is very specific about students having to understand what it means to be a citizen within the Australian

democracy. That in particular picks up statements from the national civics statements of learning in that area. It is also, as the minister indicated, specific to understanding democracy in the ACT.

There are also a couple of essential learning achievements which pick up notions of intercultural understanding and students having respect for and understanding of the diversity of others. We believe that is also an important foundation to students having an active participation in civic life.

MR GENTLEMAN: Do those programs occur right through primary and secondary college as well? As I mentioned, the people giving us submissions indicated that they felt that civics dropped off as they went further through the secondary education system where they got closer to the voting age.

Mr Barr: Yes, it certainly is incorporated through the four phases, through early, shall we say middle years, the first early years of high school and then into the senior secondary. It is a feature across the entire curriculum. In the context of what has been an interesting debate around Australian history as well in recent times there's an opportunity for the ACT at a national level to bring forward a dialogue about the role of Canberra in the Australian story.

Again, we can clearly have a greater degree of emphasis on that within our own schools, but I see this as an important part of a broader national debate. With some of my other ministerial hats on, I think we need a better understanding of why Canberra is here, the important role that we play in the national political debate but also, more broadly in this country, it's an important feature that needs to be talked about more in the context of Australian history in other jurisdictions as well. It's certainly a matter that I'll be taking up through MCEETYA and with the federal minister to ensure that Canberra's role in the Australian story is not lost in this broader debate about Australian history.

DR FOSKEY: It's certainly clear that the curriculum renewal project has been a good process and it's good to hear the minister's words here. But I'm also aware that this was one area in the department that was specifically targeted for job loss. I hope to hear to the contrary, but I heard a few months ago that the civics area was going to lose the professional person whose professional development area was that. I would like to be reassured that that isn't the case. I'd also like an answer to the question as to why the curriculum area was specifically targeted for job losses when this process is in a trial period and only just being rolled out.

Mr Barr: Thank you for the question, Dr Foskey. Obviously the department had to undertake a reorganisation following the budget. We were given significantly fewer resources, as all ACT government departments were. We sought to develop a new organisational structure and I'll get Dr Bruniges in a moment to outline that structure. We did, of course, acknowledge that we had, if you like, broken the back of the hard work on the curriculum development process, so it was appropriate for there to be some change in the resource allocation across the department. Nonetheless, I don't think it's fair to say that, as you've perhaps implied, this process has been abandoned or that we're seeking to move away from our commitment.

DR FOSKEY: But \$900,000.

Mr Barr: Yes, but across the entire agency. We've had to make some savings, as all ACT government departments have. I'm afraid that that is a reality that we've had to confront, but in developing a new organisational structure we have sought to ensure that there is still a focus in that area. Equally, I think it's important that we cast our eye beyond the borders of the ACT and seek to source quality curriculum content from other jurisdictions as well. But we cannot seek to reinvent the wheel every time here. We do have the opportunity as a smaller jurisdiction and through, as I've mentioned earlier, some of the ministerial companies that we're part of, where we contribute on a per capita basis to the development of content, to be a little bit more strategic in how we source our curriculum content. I'll get Dr Bruniges to outline the new organisational structure, but I don't think I can accept your assertion that we have abandoned—

DR FOSKEY: I don't believe I said that.

Mr Barr: Well, you were certainly implying that we were walking away from our commitment to—

MRS DUNNE: I don't think she said that either.

DR FOSKEY: I didn't say that, Mr Barr.

Dr Bruniges: Dr Foskey, in terms of the curriculum officers, we will have a designated officer in the studies of society and its environment, which will include that civics role, next year. The way in which I've chosen to look at the structure of the department is to ensure that we have key learning expertise in each of the eight key learning areas within the curriculum and that we source best practice curriculum material from each of those key learning areas from other jurisdictions, from ministerial companies. But once the curriculum framework is designed it's not so much the development of curriculum; it's really a matter of teacher professional learning about that curriculum.

So I've reduced, in terms of budget requirements, the curriculum area so that we have high functioning, key learning expertise in maths, English, science—in the eight key learning areas—and then made sure that we've got a teacher professional learning program to help teachers and to support teachers to understand the nature of the curriculum. Because in the ACT we have that school-based curriculum development, once we develop centrally the curriculum framework, trial and validate it, we then need the bigger emphasis on, and the weight of resources in the department needs to be behind, supporting teacher professional learning.

We have a very strong teacher professional learning policy and fund and we've been working closely with principals associations and their union to ensure that we have a professional learning policy in schools that enables us to devolve funding direct to schools and gives them the flexibility to plan individual and subject area teacher professional learning based on their needs. So I'm not concerned. In terms of curriculum development, as Minister Barr has said, we've just about got the framework. We now need to put our resources into making sure that our teachers

understand the meaning of that framework and support it with their professional learning.

MRS DUNNE: I have a technical question on the subject of the curriculum development framework and the trial. I think Ms Davy might be the best person. Can you explain a little bit about what is actually happening in the trial? The trial seems to be being rolled out essentially over one semester. What are the aims? What are you looking to achieve in that one-semester trial?

Ms Davy: Thank you for the question, Mrs Dunne. Essentially, what we're trying to do is to have a small number of schools devote extra time to look at the detail of how the curriculum framework can be implemented into school programming. So our intent at the end of this—

MRS DUNNE: Is it actually to teach the curriculum framework?

Ms Davy: No. Our intent at the end of the semester is to be able to generate a number of sample school programs, sample teaching units of work, sample school stories about how schools have gone about making decisions about the moving of the curriculum framework into their school curriculum plans.

MRS DUNNE: That's the misunderstanding I've had. I thought you were actually rolling it out for a semester, into the classrooms, but you're not doing that.

Ms Davy: Some schools might. Some of the trial schools may get to that point. Some of the trial schools, for example, may be focusing on only English within the curriculum framework—developing a school English scope and sequence—and might get down to first term next year trialling some of that in the classroom and seeing how it works. But, essentially, we want this trial to generate some sample programs so we can share those school stories and those programs across all schools before the end of next year, and we want to get feedback about whether what we've got in the curriculum framework is realistic and whether it is all essential. So for schools to have the time to devote to drilling down into trying to program from the framework will give us that feedback.

I also add that, while we've got those 22 schools doing the intensive trial, our expectation is that all schools, now that they have the phase 2 framework and now that we're supporting contact executive teachers in all schools, will be familiarising themselves with that phase 2 framework and will be taking the opportunity through our network meetings of all school contact teachers each term to give us feedback about the framework as well. So we're not just reliant on the 22 schools in the trial to give us feedback about the framework.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you for that, because that really makes it clearer what the trial is about. Can I follow up with another on the framework and what it hopes to achieve: what is the balance in that between skills and content? For a long time educational theory was about us needing to equip students with the skills to go out and learn things for themselves, and in a sense the content wasn't important or wasn't considered as important. Part of the debate about history, for example, is that you can teach people the research skills but should you be teaching them particular sorts of

content? What is the balance, say, in the history part of SOSE between the skills and the content, and what is the content that you're proposing to roll out?

Dr Bruniges: I think both are important, Mrs Dunne; I'll be very clear on that. I think our essential learnings probably look at the types of skills that students need to be able to do and know, but we've also embedded within each of those areas essential content. We've been quite explicit in each of the band areas against each of the essential learnings on what that essential content should be. I don't think it should be content-free at all, and, as we move through the trial getting experts to look at the essential learning that we've articulated for each of those development stages of schools is an important part of the feedback.

MRS DUNNE: With the *Every chance to learn* document you haven't got extensive discussion, say, in the English syllabus about how you move from Dick and Dora to *King Lear* over 13 years. Some people know who Dick and Dora are!

Dr Bruniges: Sue and Wendy.

MRS DUNNE: David, Sue and Wendy, yes. Where is that documentation going to be and where do your parents and teachers get the confidence to know that eventually all of that will be rolled out and that there is some confidence that somewhere we're going to move from David, Sue and Wendy through what might be considered the canon, the bits that should hang off that are sort of less traditional. Where does that all hang out so that people can eventually see and be consoled that it's all there?

Dr Bruniges: I think the first phase is that essential content we've got in the framework. Once we get the essential content and we get experts to look at that—and we've already been through a process where we've asked other jurisdictions' content experts to look at what we've got in the trial document—the other part will come from the programming and planning in the trial, as examples of work. In fact, in the government sector some of our thinking at the moment for government, and it may go across both sectors depending on the task force's view, a curriculum requirement statement might be the next lower level that we require students to do. So at the moment the framework has the essential learning. We specify the essential content in each of those areas.

MRS DUNNE: Is there more to it than that which is outlined in the publication *Every chance to learn*?

Dr Bruniges: Not at this stage, no, there's not. The trialling and the validation will help us determine the next layer of detail that we have to look at doing.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I suppose that's what I'm after, and it doesn't exist as yet.

Mr Barr: I think you can rest assured, Mrs Dunne, that, whilst we won't be asking Chairman Mao, we certainly won't be asking Mr Howard or Ms Bishop to be providing that level of content for us.

MRS DUNNE: You can make your politic points; I'm really interested in the content, minister. It doesn't matter who proposes the content; it's: do we have the best content

to ensure that our children get to the end—

Mr Barr: We will be seeking to achieve that without undue political interference, both at my level and from the commonwealth.

MRS DUNNE: Good.

Mr Barr: I've been provided with some additional information that will answer Mr Gentleman's question about schools in the trial. There are eight non-government schools participating, three in the independent sector and five Catholic schools, and I can table the list for the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for the list. Dr Bruniges, the minister mentioned a few minutes ago teacher professional learning and page 11 talks about the restorative practices program and how it's being supported in the department and through some professional learning for teachers and for, one presumes, principals in those schools. Could you let us know a little bit more about how that is being rolled out. You're aware, of course, that this committee has been doing and is still doing some work in that area. I'm interested to know a bit more.

Dr Bruniges: Thank you for the question. It's going really well. It's growing. We've got 27 primary schools and 10 high schools that have commenced the implementation of restorative practices. Some schools have achieved a change of culture across the whole school community by using those strategies and really looking at building on the social and emotional capital in the whole school community.

I don't think it's something that you put out and make everyone do at once. The method that we're using is that each of those schools is choosing to do it, each of them is putting in place processes and what we're seeing is a gradual growth in the number of schools participating. I expect that this time next year when we're sitting here we will have a stronger number of schools engaging in that process.

Teacher professional learning goes along with that. We find that some schools have tailored programs in each of their settings; they work through with their community. That will differ. During the hearing on restorative practices we had one example of a principal with us from Charnwood who talked about their case studies and what they were doing. As I said, the teacher professional learning and the engagement that goes with that seems to be very high. It's very pleasing, I think.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, on page 13 there's a column on new initiatives and towards the end it talks about consideration of the year 12 certificate and also the implementation of A to E reporting. Can you tell us whether the ACT will be implementing the A to E reporting and, if so, how will you go about doing it?

Mr Barr: As I'm sure the committee's aware, A to E reporting in schools is an initiative that has been required by the Australian government in order for the territory to receive funding. The advice I have here is that the Australian government's schools assistance act 2004 and the associated regulations of 2005 require schools to report relative and comparative reporting of student achievement using A to E grades against learning areas for subjects studied, to be in plain English and to be provided twice a

year.

The department has recently released a policy that will enable ACT schools to comply with these Australian government requirements for students in years 1 through 12. We're able to in kindergarten achieve an outcome where student achievement will be reported using performance indicators in primary schools, or PIPS, as the standardised assessment. That will be conducted at the beginning and the end of each year, and parents of kindergarten students received the first of these reports at the end of term 1 this year.

Schools are being assisted with the development of reports using an electronic report generator that will be linked to the information systems currently available. High schools and colleges implemented the requirements at the end of semester 1 2006, as they already currently use a common database for entering grades. To allow time for professional development, primary schools will implement A to E reports by the end of the second semester this year.

Alternative reporting arrangements for those students who are exempt from the ACTAP assessment system, such as students with a disability, have been put in place. All schools are consulting with their communities to develop school reporting procedures by the end of this year and professional learning is being provided to primary school teachers on assessment using A to E grades and new reporting software. Parents will be surveyed on their responses to the new A to E reporting following the implementation of the primary school reporting at the end of the year.

MR GENTLEMAN: Were you advised why the federal government wanted this introduced?

Mr Barr: Personally, no, as I wasn't minister at the time. However, it is certainly an issue of some debate. It's unfortunate that the commonwealth has sought to tie funding to this particular requirement. It's a growing trend that we're seeing: the commonwealth seeking to intervene in state and territory education systems, to use very blunt instruments to enforce their particular views on how education should be conducted in Australia. I think that's a very unfortunate development but I'm afraid that under the current federal government we're going to see more of it.

We obviously require the funding assistance from the commonwealth so we weren't in a position to refuse to undertake this work, but we've sought to do this cooperatively and to ensure that the process is implemented with as much community consultation and as much parental and school involvement as possible. But many in the education sector have expressed concerns about A to E grading for six-year-olds and I think those concerns are quite valid. We will see at the end of this process what the community feedback is. There is some community support for, shall we say, plain English reporting, but I think there is equally a degree of concern about seeking to grade children that young on an A to E scale. I think that's an area of considerable concern, but we'll get further data on this at the end of this school year.

MR GENTLEMAN: Were you able to seek comments from educators on this subject or did it simply have to be rolled out?

Mr Barr: We did seek to work with the education union and other education stakeholders. All players were aware of the financial stick that the commonwealth were beating the states and territories with on this initiative. As I say, it is an unfortunate intervention on the commonwealth's part into what is a clear area of responsibility for the states and territories. I fear that we are going to see through the next commonwealth-state funding round for education further encroachments from the commonwealth seeking to tie funding to particular outcomes that seem to be entirely on an ideological bent coming from the Prime Minister and the education minister at a federal level.

MRS DUNNE: On that subject, as a parent I got from one school an opt-out letter; I probably haven't been through the bag of the other child to see whether I got one from that school as well. I chose not to opt out, so I haven't returned the letter. What is the approach? One school I've seen has opt-out letters. Is there a uniform approach or what is happening about informing the parents about A to E reporting and what may or may not be necessary?

Dr Bruniges: We've asked each school to work with their school community to work out that. The federal minister, Minister Bishop, had made an allowance that if parents chose to opt out from receiving A to E reports schools could work with their community to ask exactly that question. So that was really from the—

MRS DUNNE: But that's not a blanket thing across the system; it may be just an initiative of a particular school?

Dr Bruniges: It may be. It may be that the school board has made a decision. What we want to do is capture, in that survey information, information coming back about what each of our school communities here in Canberra felt about that.

MRS DUNNE: Okay. Can I open up a new line of questioning?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Thanks. Before I go on, can I compliment the department on the annual report this year; it is much more legible, easier to find your way around, doesn't have glossy paper and all of those things. Generally, the presentation is an improvement.

On page 21, I'm particularly interested in the table—parent and student satisfaction with government schooling. I think this highlights the problems that we as a community are encountering in promoting government high schooling. This is also reflected in yesterday's census which again shows a decline in enrolments in government high schools of, I think, only 0.9 per cent, but again we're seeing the trend. You've said that we're looking at roughly a one per cent a year decline in enrolments here. I suppose the question is: (a) are you concerned by the sort of disparity and satisfaction between the other sectors and the high school sectors and (b) is there a sort of overall holistic strategic approach to address that? Would you like to give an exposition on what you're doing?

Mr Barr: I think it's important to give some background to these surveys.

Approximately one-third of government schools conduct surveys of parents, students and staff each year as part of the three-year review and development cycle. In 2005 the surveys were conducted at Lanyon, Wanniasa, Amaroo and Gold Creek high schools, and these schools, excluding Amaroo, last conducted surveys in 2002 and they will again be surveyed in 2008.

MRS DUNNE: So those blocks remain the same?

Mr Barr: Yes. Obviously the analysis and interpretation of the data helps schools to identify strengths and areas for improvement and helps inform the development of each school's three-year strategic plan. External validation of the school review was introduced this year, 2006, and involves panels of experienced educators visiting schools to review their self-assessment of performance and their strategic planning, and this process is overseen by an external lead validator; currently this is Louise Bywaters, a senior educator from South Australia.

I think it is worth noting that due to the different schools surveyed the survey data isn't comparable from year to year. The department is looking at investigating and developing a different measure as well to ensure that there is greater comparability of survey data from year to year. I think that's important. Whilst the three-year snapshot is useful, I think we can improve there.

MRS DUNNE: You'll note I haven't compared it year on year, for that reason.

Mr Barr: Yes, sure. A number of issues are raised and, yes, I think you are correct to identify that at the high school level there are slightly lower levels of satisfaction than in the primary and college sectors. But we have introduced a number of strategies, which are identified in individual school plans, to address some of the issues that are raised. These include the introduction of protocols for working cooperatively in classrooms, the inclusion of students in school decision-making and governance, including a specific reference to students with severe disabilities, and increasing opportunities and upskilling of students' abilities to negotiate the curriculum.

Ms Bywaters, the external lead validator, has also made some observations of the high schools that underwent validation in 2006 and these were schools that were surveyed in 2004 and will be surveyed again in 2007. These observations included the need for strong and respectful positive relationships between teachers and students; schools working with a strong values framework; strong pastoral care systems, including a systematic follow-up of those students at risk and those who are underachieving, using a range of interventions tailored to suit individual needs; looking at the positive and unique impact of restorative practices, something I know the committee chair is particularly interested in and supportive of; looking towards a substantial reduction in incidents of bullying. I had the opportunity last month to speak at a forum on school bullying that was conducted by SOULanimation at the National Press Club. An important part of our focus is to reduce incidents of bullying within schools.

We also need to acknowledge the success of the youth worker in schools program and the inclusion of youth workers in staff teams. We need to look at making curriculum more contemporary, relevant and engaging—we discussed at some length that process that's under way—with a focus on community-based learning and community

involvement; seek greater student reflection on learning encouraged with positive outcomes, both in- and out-of-school activities; seek greater cultural inclusion and support for indigenous students; and also look to improve transitions processes at those key points from primary to high school and from high school to college.

I might at this point get Dr Bruniges to give you a little bit more detail on the strategies in high schools. What we've seen from this external validation process is a number of areas that we need to do more work in, but also some acknowledgment that areas where we have implemented initiatives in recent years have seen significant improvements. So, whilst I acknowledge there are still issues in the high school sector, I think we are starting to make a difference, but we do need to follow that up with further initiatives and some of those I've outlined.

MRS DUNNE: Before we go on to Dr Bruniges: just looking at the student satisfaction survey, 93 per cent of children in years 5 and 6 say that they think they're getting a good education in government schools and 92 per cent of students in years 11 and 12 say that they believe they're getting a good education. But only 81 per cent of children in years 7 to 10 personally believe they're getting a good education. That seems to be a substantial drop-off. Some of this could be accounted for by the angst of age and hormones, but it seems to me that it's not a statistical blip but a substantial drop-off in satisfaction in those years. Only 81 per cent of students say that they feel they are getting a good education. So yes to the stuff about restorative practices and yes to pastoral care. But are they telling us that they're not happy with the content of what they're learning or how they learn, and what are you doing to address that?

Mr Barr: A clear area for improvement from the students' perspective was engagement in the things that they're learning and that the work they're doing is of interest to them. There are clearly areas where when surveyed high school students showed significantly less support for what is currently happening in high schools. The new curriculum framework does provide an opportunity to provide more relevant content but, as I think is indicated by the external validator, the need to involve students in that process is important. Obviously you're more likely to be engaged and interested in what you're learning if you've had some input, and particularly for students in that age group, who are capable of providing significant input into the content of what they're being taught. So I see that as a particular area where we can improve, and certainly that's part of the trial process for the curriculum development for next year that we'll see. As you would be aware, a number of the high schools on that list are involved in that process, so I see that as a real opportunity to improve our performance in those areas.

MRS DUNNE: What does the instrument look like that you use to survey these students so that you come up with some sort of synthesis that tells you how many students think they're getting a good education and how many students are satisfied with their school?

Dr Bruniges: It is a survey tool and there is a series of statements in which students actually rate. For example, just to reinforce what Minister Barr has said, we know by looking deeper into the survey that the areas for improvement were statements that students reacted to: "I have a say in things I learn. I'm doing work that interests me". So we're able to drill down to the individual question or item level and have a look at

exactly what they believe is working really well.

I have to say that, in looking at that level of detail, there were things that students felt strongly on the positive side. Ninety per cent of students agreed with “The things that I’m learning are important to me. Other framework questions were: “I know what I have to do and I get the results that I want” and “Teachers want me to do the best I can” and “I understand the rules of the school.” All those framework questions we’re able to deal down and have a look.

After looking at this, the areas for improvement for them that I took away were: the whole concept of student engagement, relevance, meaningful, making sure that we’re having provisions for pathways for them. When we look at things like SNAPS and our apprenticeships and trainees, if we did the same survey for them we’d have a high level of satisfaction from the same students. So it’s about that individual pathway planning for some students. Other bits that are about are relevant and meaning curriculum and making sure that what we put in place lifts the level of student engagement. I think that’s the critical part.

In doing this we’ve also looked around at other jurisdictions, Mrs Dunne, at whether or not high schools suffer the same thing, and we find that it’s a similar pattern. When we look at the Queensland school opinion survey and the measurement of student satisfaction, we’re not the lone rider in terms of the high school area; there are a lot of challenges by all jurisdictions around fundamentally that student engagement. We’re very fortunate that we have a survey tool that enables us to gain a diagnostic capacity to look deeper and then to put in strategies where that’s most needed. So that’s what we’re working on at the moment, as part of that overall school excellence framework.

MRS DUNNE: With these surveys what sort of return rate do you get for both students and parents?

Dr Bruniges: Fairly high, I think. Mr Curry might know the detail. We can probably get the percentages back to you. It’s part of that validation process, so there’s a relatively high level of engagement. It’s not as though it’s everybody every year, but for these schools they’re really focused on that, so encouraging response rates is very important because it informs their school planning.

MRS DUNNE: So these schools—Lanyon, Wanniasa, Amaroo and Gold Creek—will be resurveyed in 2008?

Dr Bruniges: Yes.

Mr Barr: So a third each year on a three-year cycle.

MRS DUNNE: And what thinking have you had about surveying the whole student body?

Dr Bruniges: That’s again an interesting question. This one provides that diagnostic area—

MRS DUNNE: About the school, but it doesn’t tell you about the whole system.

Dr Bruniges: That's right. What we're working on are strategies on the ground in each one of those schools, because where you make a difference is in the context of the individual schools. When we look around the team in our newly-formed measurement, monitoring and reporting directorate as a result of our organisational review, one of the exercises we've set ourselves is to look at the best practice in jurisdiction and how we measure satisfaction across the whole cohort to ensure that we have comparable data from year to year, and as we go, and have a look at that.

I was appalled at the article in the *Canberra Times* around the reporting of the measurement of satisfaction. It's simply not comparable and in fact wrong figures were quoted. I was quite alarmed at an article that I saw around student satisfaction in that area. We need to have good measures in place. We've got a great diagnostic tool here; we need to collect that data at the school level and source the best possible one that does give us comparable data from year to year. We're doing that at the moment. Where we see satisfaction being measured probably more than most is in private enterprise where you get customer and client satisfaction measures and proper scales being developed to ensure that you can quantify a change over time. I think that's what we're aiming at in the end, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Correct me if I'm wrong: these satisfaction levels are also reported on in the output classes later on and in the budget papers where you set yourself targets for satisfaction?

Dr Bruniges: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: So there is some level of comparability year on year; otherwise your targets would be all over the place: "This year we're doing this cluster of schools so our target will have to be different." They don't vary in that way, so I've deliberately not compared year on year. But the thing is that you set yourselves targets that are essentially consistent and you should expect to receive consistent results year on year, even if they are from different schools. You do expect that?

Dr Bruniges: That's correct, yes.

MRS DUNNE: And if you're not receiving that, you're saying, "I've got a problem here," or "This one's doing really well."

Dr Bruniges: "Let's have a deeper look at why that is on the diagnostic capacity, and let's focus on that diagnostic capacity." What I'd like in time is a measure that enables us to do it from year to year, as well as the diagnostic, so that we have a more realistic, I guess, setting of targets within the framework.

THE CHAIR: We'll go to morning tea now.

Meeting adjourned from 10.46 to 11.05 am.

THE CHAIR: We have some guests from the Jordanian parliament with us for about half an hour. You are very welcome. I hope you enjoy your observation of this committee. We have several people here who are committee secretaries from the

Jordanian parliament. I presume that they know what this particular committee is about.

We now go back to the questions in output class 1. We seem to be in that area at the moment. I had a couple of questions.

MRS DUNNE: Could I have an indulgence, Madam Chair? I have a follow-on question.

THE CHAIR: Yes, Mrs Dunne.

Mr Barr: By way of indulgence, Mrs Dunne!

MRS DUNNE: I crave indulgence, yes, for a follow-on question from what happened before, which I forgot to ask. It may be something you take on notice. The parent satisfaction with government survey is at page 21. The targets and the output classes are at page 166. The targets and the results are slightly different. I presume there was some amalgamation or massaging of all the figures in the different classes into one figure. Could somebody give me an explanation? If that needs to be taken on notice, if it is more expeditious to take it on notice, that is fine.

Mr Barr: We will take it on notice.

THE CHAIR: I had a couple of what may be quick ones, but I am not quite sure.

Mr Barr: We have a little further information in relation to a question Mrs Dunne asked prior to morning tea about A to E reporting.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Dr Bruniges: To be really clear, Mrs Dunne asked a question about withdrawing children from A to E reporting by request in writing. As part of our policy, we have a statement that schools will inform parents that they can withdraw their child from A to E reporting by requesting so in writing. How the school board—

MRS DUNNE: I should have got two letters then.

Dr Bruniges: Yes, and you may still get one to come. It may come by the newsletter.

THE CHAIR: They can embed it in the newsletter. Is that what you are saying?

Dr Bruniges: Yes. It may not come as an individual letter; it may, depending on the school board's decision or it may be in a newsletter, advising parents of that. But they must do it in writing if parents would like to do that.

THE CHAIR: Remembering how I quickly used to read newsletters, I am wondering whether they find it. Let us hope they do. We mentioned briefly declining enrolments, but I note at page 18, under the heading "Special education", it talks about an increase in the number of young people with disabilities by 1.9 per cent from the 2004-05 period to now. I was wondering why it might be that we are having this increase. Do

you know? It mentions that a total of 1,698 students with a disability were identified in special and mainstream schools in the February 2006 census. This is an increase of 1.9 per cent on the 2004-05 numbers.

Dr Bruniges: There are probably a number of reasons associated with that—the earlier and better methods of diagnosis that we have now in diagnosing a range of needs for students, particularly those with a disability. We have improved in terms of the diagnosis. We have a look at parents being more accepting of that diagnosis and confirmation of disability. Our school counsellors and teachers have a growing and increasing understanding of the indications of disability. Basically, we are getting better at the diagnosis. We see that increase as we get more sophisticated with diagnosis and the readiness of parents to accept that, and for us to provide appropriate support where it is needed.

THE CHAIR: I go back to some stats or some benchmarking. I know it is before output 1, but I meant to ask it before. At page 10, there is a graph. It indicates that, whilst we seem to be ahead in achieving above national benchmarks everywhere, we are slightly below in writing in year 5 and year 7. Is there something that we can track there?

Mr Barr: It is important to acknowledge that there are, if you like, error margins on what are called confidence intervals that need to be taken into account when considering these results between jurisdictions. The statisticians amongst us would refer to that as a margin of error. Whilst there is on these graphs a slight difference where the ACT's performance is somewhat lower than the national average, they are certainly well within, if you like, the margin of error. Any survey is going to have, depending on the sample size obviously, depending on the number of students surveyed, a larger or smaller margin of error.

Whilst it is pleasing to note that, in many of the other areas, we are above the margin of error, we are performing greater than the national average and above that margin of error in many of the other key benchmarks. Within those areas you have identified, we fall slightly below on these figures, but they are within the margin of error for the survey.

MRS DUNNE: They are not statistically significant?

Mr Barr: Indeed. That would be how a statistician would sum up in conclusion.

MRS DUNNE: Can I ask a follow-up question not about the statistical significance but about the level of the benchmark. There has been some discussion in some of the reviews of literacy and numeracy that we have seen in the past few years that the benchmarks themselves may be a pretty low mark and that perhaps we should be aiming to achieve more. Where are the Department of Education and Training and you, minister, in that debate? What work is being done to assess the benchmarks? Are they still roughly what they were when we first started doing literacy and numeracy testing? Should we be ramping them up and setting higher benchmarks? Is it too easy to get 90 per cent of children over the national benchmark?

Mr Barr: More tag team on this. Dr Bruniges can go first and then I will.

Dr Bruniges: If we go back to the advent of the benchmarks, I can remember probably back a decade ago the benchmarks in curriculum terms for those things that students should be able to do as a result of spending time in schools were designed at year 3s and year 5s in curriculum terms. When the assessment started to happen, each jurisdiction had its own testing program. We are able to chart, along the scale, student achievement.

The national benchmark was a line drawn on every jurisdiction's scale that said, "At this point, here is your scale. It is this long. Here is where the benchmark is." That was then equated across states and territories; so everyone had the same national benchmark. They defined it as meaning this kind of thing. This is what this benchmark means students can do.

It started out as a curriculum measurement instrument. It then turned to a national reading benchmark. That was the first one. They then introduced year 5. I guess part of that debate was seeing whether or not we could measure the difference between years 3 and 5, which is what you really want to do, because you want to measure the impact of your intervention strategies in each of the jurisdictions.

In the secondary schools, we use OECD and PISA data. Indeed, there are a series of benchmarks in the secondary that you use, because they have got a series of lines along those scales. The years 3 and 5 one has still remained the original benchmark that was set in, my memory is telling me, about 1997. That was the line on the scale. We are now moving, in terms of both the MCEETYA forum and the AESOC forum, which all the CEOs work in, to look at making sure that we get years 3 and 5 on a scale that we are able to track year 3 students not just at that benchmark but all the way up the scale and that, indeed, we are able to quantify how much and who has moved between 3 and 5. That is the work that is currently under way.

On the national level, we are moving towards national cohort testing under the states grants legislation, with the first of those national tests planned for 2008, for 3, 5 and 7. One of the aims of those programs is to ensure that years 3 and 5 are on a common scale, that we pick up more than the minimum benchmarks and that we are able to quantify growth of individual students between years 3, 5, 7 and 9. But it is a huge agenda. To begin with, to get one national benchmark has been a huge achievement across all ministers.

MRS DUNNE: I do not disagree with that.

Dr Bruniges: Moving towards 2008, that is the work that is being undertaken now in each of the—

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, I do not have a clear understanding of or feel for what it is that you hope to achieve in 2008.

Dr Bruniges: In 2008, simply put, we will have one national test for all jurisdictions in which we are able to measure student achievement on a number of benchmarks in year 3, year 5 and year 7.

MRS DUNNE: That is good, but my question was: are the benchmarks set right? Being simplistic about the whole thing, you would assume that, if you are using an A to E scale, which I know is not politically correct but I am going to use it anyhow, most of the children would achieve C and then there would be people over and above that. The national benchmark for literacy in year 3 is a nationally agreed thing and most people would expect to achieve a C or above?

Mr Barr: Are you in fact asking: do we still operate on a bell curve?

MRS DUNNE: No, I am not asking that. I am asking: is there confidence that what is seen as, say, the year 3 literacy benchmarks reflect our expectations of what an average child or better could be doing at that stage of development? Is it a reflection of what we expect our children to do or is it something less than that? A lot of people have the feeling that it is something less than that. I would like some direction on it, one way or the other.

Dr Bruniges: The national benchmark was always set at the typical expectation of students progressing to year 3. Until we have got the data we do not know, for example, in the ACT we perform very well, the Northern Territory do not perform as well and other jurisdictions do not. How hard it is for some students to get there depends on what jurisdiction you are in. You can clearly see that in the results.

Some people would argue—and we hear it—that we want to chart the range of student assessment and that most of our students do very well on that benchmark. In the Northern Territory, it would provide some challenges for indigenous students to even reach that benchmark. When you look at their data and that of other jurisdictions, there will be all of that. Trying to get a national view about a minimum benchmark is a very difficult thing, and that is why moving to a series of benchmarks is so critically important.

MRS DUNNE: Will they reflect, for instance, that, if you are in year 3 and you are seven or eight years old, your reading age will be that of a seven or eight-year-old and your spelling age and your literacy age will be that of a seven or eight-year-old? Will we be able to measure that 70, 80 or 90 per cent of children in year 3 have the reading age that they need at that stage? I really do not know that parents have a feel for what the national benchmark means. Does it mean that my child is achieving the way that it should be or is it something lower than that?

Dr Bruniges: It is a minimum standard, as I have said before, for the ACT. Where we need to look for each individual child is the questions they got right and got wrong, because that is the true diagnostic capacity. While a benchmark is simply a line on a scale and you are either above it or below it, the diagnostic information comes from looking at my daughter's results on the benchmark and finding out that these are her strengths and weaknesses and being able to put something in place. That is a better indicator of what you need to do next in support for an individual.

MRS DUNNE: As a system, you need something else?

Dr Bruniges: Absolutely, and as a system we should be looking across those individuals and picking areas of strengths and weakness and then designing teacher

professional learning programs, particular initiatives to target a particular weakness for professional learning or a targeted initiative. That is the power that will come when we have that consistency.

Mr Barr: There were three key points where there is an emerging consensus across jurisdictions. They are the need for the system to be able to meet individual needs and a greater focus on the value add, if you like, to ensure that. We can all sit back and say, “We have been to a particular school in what might be a higher socioeconomic area and all the students might be achieving above the benchmark.” But that does not necessarily indicate the value of what is occurring in the school. The third issue where there is an emerging consensus is the importance of investment in the early years.

I have recently returned from a ministerial forum on early childhood development. I pay tribute to the South Australian minister who is pioneering work in this area. We are seeing jurisdictions moving towards a greater focus on early childhood and investment of resources at that level, because all of the evidence shows that that early intervention is crucial to ensuring quality outcomes later in life. We perform very well in that area, but there are things that we can learn from what is occurring in South Australia. Certainly whilst we were in Adelaide on Friday I took the opportunity to visit some of the really successful programs that are run in that state. That is something that we will be incorporating in future years in our curriculum framework but also in models and ideas for how we can better focus on those early years.

MR GENTLEMAN: Whilst still on output class 1, I go to something that was touched on earlier, communications technology. At page 19, there is improved information on communications technology resources in schools. In the second last paragraph there is discussion about the new IT in-school support. It has allowed teachers to go back to, I guess, face-to-face teaching. Can you tell us how many teachers have been able to return to the classroom?

Mr Barr: I will probably need to throw it to a departmental official for that level of detail, but I can inform the committee that DET commissioned Dr Malcolm Pettigrove in July 2006 to undertake a consultancy to report on the effectiveness of the 2005 budget initiatives as they related to delivery enhancement of ICT in schools. The underlying message in that report was that interactive whiteboards provide a greater level of interactivity of student engagement and provide the enabling technology to support other learning initiatives in ACT schools, such as, as we have talked about, the myclasses systems and the use of the Learning Federation’s learning objects.

I am advised that the initiative thus far has resulted in a nearly 275 per cent increase in the number of interactive whiteboards in ACT schools. At the commencement of the program, there were 125 in schools, giving a ratio of one whiteboard to 280 students. At the conclusion of this particular round, there are 576 interactive whiteboards in schools, reducing that ratio from one to 280 to one to 60. We will continue, through our investment in information technology, to see that program continue.

The report acknowledged that the ACT has made significant steps in providing the foundation for system-wide change. The report’s recommendations have formed an essential component in planning the remainder of that funding that is available this financial year and will also roll on through the \$20 million over the next four years. In

terms of the number of teachers that have been able to return to classroom duty: yes, Dr Bruniges.

Dr Bruniges: I was re-reading that paragraph then. Looking at that, we found in the past that this was really a needs-driven initiative. When ICT first goes into a school, those teachers who are really good and technical, I guess, take the running. We found that there were probably a number of line allowances given to those teachers with technical expertise to support those without the technical expertise. The department, in this initiative, used that technical expertise, which I referred to in answer to Dr Foskey's earlier question, to allow teachers to focus on teaching, which is their expertise, and to be underpinned by the technical work from technical expertise. Per se, it is not about putting more teachers there, but every teacher does not have to worry about the technical support; it is there automatically, with people with technical expertise.

Mr Barr: I have just been passed a note that it is estimated that the introduction of this technical support has returned 800 teaching hours per week back to schools.

MR GENTLEMAN: That is very good.

MRS DUNNE: Would the committee be able to see the analysis report or the review report of Dr Pettigrove?

Mr Barr: Yes.

Dr Bruniges: Yes, certainly we will get a copy of that report.

MR GENTLEMAN: While we are still on the same subject—minister, you and Dr Bruniges raised earlier the myclasses learning system—can you tell me how the introduction has benefited the education of students and the level of government education, whether it is primary, secondary, college, et cetera, that uses the myclasses system most?

Mr Barr: It applies across all three sectors. I might throw to a techy expert here who is going to provide some of the techy best.

Dr Bruniges: Who is going to do her techy best. With myclasses, the example that comes to mind is: just recently I was involved with the chamber of commerce and illustrated to them some of the advantages of myclasses in looking at making sure that we understood from a whole community perspective how wonderful the learning management system was. It is available to both teachers and students from any location, including their home, and in a very secure manner. It is a web-based product. That enables a whole lot of the materials that we spoke about when Mrs Dunne asked the question to be accessed in the home environment, in a secure platform, so that students are able to do that.

In regard to the example I was referring to with the chamber of commerce, we were discussing vocational education and training and how important it was in a series of apprenticeships to make parents aware of the range of offerings and how we might in fact use myclasses to be able to build up a bank of resources and opportunities for

people like the chamber of commerce to look at industry and data in terms of myclasses.

At the moment we have got, looking across the eight colleges, 1,631 virtual classes that are created for communication and network. Across our 18 high schools, we have 3,255 network connections actually happening. Across our 74 primary schools, we have got about 2½ thousand of those networks. Looking at that on a monthly basis, we have got the amount of access or hits per month. In our college sector, we have about 22,000 hits per month in that environment; in high schools, 50,000; and in primary schools, about 19,000. On our website we have got lots of examples of myclasses in action and the kinds of things that students are able to do within school to connect.

Being able to do that is just the start of that forefront of reaching out and accessing all of those resources that we have got. We are documenting cases studies of what schools are doing with it. Teachers tend to share their practice, I guess, amongst one another. It seems to grow from there.

It is a very exciting initiative. I do not think it will always be the initiative. As I said before, the dynamic nature of what we are dealing with here will change, but it is certainly enabling a greater access to a range of resources and support for students in their learning.

MR GENTLEMAN: I imagine these resources are proven and the information is proven so that we do not have that instance that Mrs Dunne raised earlier about misinformation.

Mr Barr: I have only had the chance to play around with it once, but I make the observation that, for many of us older folks, secondary/high school and college education would have been improved markedly by having access to that sort of technology—the ability to have, for particular essays, assignments and all the rest of it, the actual detail available on line. The excuse of a dog eating your homework is no longer available. However, if your ISP crashed—

MRS DUNNE: Mind you, the server could eat your homework.

Mr Barr: Yes, if your server crashes, then that is like hard copy.

THE CHAIR: I had a cat eat an essay once. You mentioned before engagements and the ways by which you measure the satisfaction of young people at school and whether they feel engaged or not. Whilst you were talking about that, you mentioned school-based apprenticeships. At page 22, it talks about school-based apprenticeships. It mentions that 241 students commenced school-based apprenticeships in 2005. Do we know how many of those students have completed, or are some of those students still completing?

Dr Bruniges: A bit of both. In terms of our latest stats there, at the end of November 2006, we had 250 students in government schools who had commenced a SNAP. Of those, we had 46 training contracts that were successfully completed. We have still over 100 of those who are still actively engaged, because they are at a different speed

and rate. We have looked at the data for this year, 2006, and already we are up around 207 commencing for this year.

It is something that reflects the importance of that pathway. It also helps us meet a demand in the broader community. We are seeing a better level of engagement. I guess part of that will be our looking at some survey data on how satisfied those students are, with a different pathway, and how relevant and meaningful that is. It seems to be a program that has taken off really well, that students are engaging, and we need to continue to be vigilant about, I guess, the next cohort coming through.

THE CHAIR: Given the skills shortages that we hear about—and this committee will be looking at that in more detail later—in what way are we exposing young people to the opportunity to engage in that way?

Dr Bruniges: If we look at some of the areas by industry group, you can see that those apprenticeships are feeding some of those skill shortages areas. They are business retail, automotive, information technology, hospitality, children's services and aged care. There is a breakdown of those. You will see some high correlations between that and how we are supporting the skills shortage in the broader community.

Mr Barr: I am very pleased to note that the list also includes tourism, sport and recreation.

THE CHAIR: My question was really about how we engage the young people. I assume that a lot of parents want their children, young people, to go to university. The push may be from their peers or may be from their parents or may be an understanding in their own heads that that is what they should be aiming for. How are we encouraging them to look at the full scope of opportunity that they might have, including these kinds of things?

Dr Bruniges: The most significant program—and we are very fortunate in this jurisdiction to have it—is the individual pathways planning. We have a program where each student—and we are now down to year 9—looks at the range of pathways. We support them to understand the nature of different choices they have. We work with parents on parental expectations.

People cross pathways all the time. You might start off doing this at CIT and then you might transfer to degree status. We find also degrees coming back into courses at CIT. It is a kind of a flow through. It is not the traditional way of lock-stepping a pathway and continuing to drive down that road and there is no return. Those boundaries have now blurred. The possibility of being able to make different choices at different stages in terms of life career is a really significant issue that we are finding.

These students see that they might do something in their SNAP and that there is still further learning to do on the job connected to other qualifications. We know, from the broader qualifications framework, that we need to get a move towards higher level qualifications, away from the certs I and II. We had a discussion during budget estimates about the need for us to do that. We treat the pathways planning as a stepping stone. They may first engage in a SNAP; they may secure appropriate certificate level there; but we are able to show the multiple pathways and wonderful

opportunities that arise from doing that.

Mr Barr: It is important to note also that, particularly when we get beyond year 12, there are a series of pricing signals that certainly the commonwealth government sets in relation to things like HECS. There are pathways through the CIT, for example, in some professions. Accounting is an example that comes to mind. In fact, you can get credit towards a University of Canberra accounting degree by undertaking a specific amount of study at the CIT level. It is much cheaper for you to take that pathway, rather than be loaded with a massive HECS debt courtesy of the federal Liberal government.

MRS DUNNE: It was Minister Dawkins who introduced HECS.

Mr Barr: It may well have been Minister Dawkins who introduced it, but it was a fair system then.

MRS DUNNE: If you are going to play politics, let us get it right.

Mr Barr: It was not an outrageous charge, as we see now, where students are being priced out of higher education. We are seeing an increased take-up of an alternative pathway through CIT and, in the other jurisdictions, through the TAFE sector where you can get that credit towards a university degree by undertaking that pathway. Whilst those price HECS signals remain the way they are, we are going to see an increased take-up of that pathway.

THE CHAIR: How does the ANU pilot fit into all of that then? Could you give us a bit more information about that?

Dr Bruniges: When I met with Professor Chubb about the ANU college, it was really to provide a network of educational provision for students. We have to think differently about educating students in a particular institution for all of their subjects. I guess this community provides the opportunity to be extremely innovative. It is all doable in the ACT because of geography and the number of institutions that we have got.

We were really looking at the asset base from which the community is coming and looking at the opportunities of different pathways for students. We have our colleges timetabled on a Thursday afternoon altogether, which enables students to access the provision of maths and sciences at the ANU and to be able to create a broader network of educational provision. We hope to do the same with the CIT.

We will look at other institutions and colleges, have a look at the best that is offering and then maximise the opportunities for students to choose a pathway through all of those institutions. The ANU was really the pilot, the commencement of looking at a concept of a broader network of educational provision that this community can offer, and how best we can maximise each individual student's learning pathway through the assets that we have here in the community.

Mr Barr: It is worth noting that, whilst the ANU process at the moment is being limited to maths, physics and chemistry, there is talk of an expansion into languages,

which would be another very good and worthwhile initiative. But equally, we have begun some conversations with the University of Canberra as well on establishing a similar arrangement with them. We will pursue that, particularly as there is a new vice chancellor at that university, early in the new year. That will be a subject of discussion for my first meeting with him.

THE CHAIR: Is that a particular subject area or are you not quite sure?

Mr Barr: We would seek to negotiate with the University of Canberra.

THE CHAIR: You will have a discussion with him, to begin with?

Mr Barr: I would not seek to pre-empt those discussions, other than to say that we have had a high-level discussion and there is interest. They certainly acknowledge the value for the university in being able to attract some quality students, to get them at year 11 and year 12 levels, and provide that educational pathway.

MRS DUNNE: Could I ask some questions about the practicalities of how the ANU College works. You have said that this is programmed for a Thursday afternoon, and the maths, physics and chem people go off to the ANU. Are they doing what might quaintly be called extension work? Are these people students who are doing AME—they do not call it AME here—top-level maths, physics and chemistry? Are they doing more intensive work in that area or is it an extension? Will they get some credit if they were doing maths there and went to the ANU next year? They might start in second-year maths or something like that. How does it work?

Dr Bruniges: It is just about exactly how you have described it. I guess the advantage for our students is that we have the courses designed and we use the very best of the science, maths and chemistry knowledge of the ANU. That is a course that they design, which is accredited through the BSSS as a course. It counts towards their end of year 12 certificate, but it also gives them advanced standing at the ANU in certain degrees.

MRS DUNNE: It may be more than AME or whatever?

Dr Bruniges: Absolutely. It depends on the students there. Just to give you an idea: already for 2007, we have had 188 students who have put their hand up as an expression to participate in that program.

MRS DUNNE: How do you select people?

Dr Bruniges: It goes through a whole range of processes there. The first term is normally done in the school, with the school's teachers and ANU staff looking at that. There will be project work done, an assessment done at the end of term 1, teacher input and feedback, and students and parents are talked to. We have open nights at which both Professor Chubb and I talk to all parents about the range and depth of the program there. It is a process that happens over first term in year 11. After that it triggers into the timetabling.

I guess the advantage for us is having that Thursday afternoon. We are able to set up

the same links or network with other institutions for other students. I believe it is the start of something which will broaden the provision of educational network in the community.

MRS DUNNE: I have one more question on the ANU college. There has been some discussion—and I have had some approaches—about the costs incurred by students from non-government schools in years 11 and 12. How are the costs determined? How do we determine where the costs are borne? It does not come free. I understand that.

Mr Barr: That is correct. Students in the non-government system have to make a contribution. Is that right?

Dr Bruniges: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: And the contribution is?

Mr Barr: \$1,000.

Dr Bruniges: It is to the ANU. The ANU has a memo of agreement with the non-government sector. That is run from the ANU.

MRS DUNNE: Is the cost paid to the ANU on behalf of the students in the government school system who participate in the ANU?

Dr Bruniges: The cost is borne by the system. It is our teachers teaching the course. It is like an in-kind contribution, in that our teachers also teach the non-government students. That is done by an agreement with the government sector. The students individually do not pay, but we have set that up as a government initiative for a government school college at the ANU. The non-government sector then expressed an interest in doing the same thing. They approached the ANU. That is a separate memo of understanding.

MRS DUNNE: It is a separate arrangement?

Dr Bruniges: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Let me get it straight. There are costs for the Department of Education and Training but they are largely or wholly met by in-kind contributions? The involvement of students from the non-government system is a separate arrangement with the ANU?

Dr Bruniges: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Teachers out of the Department of Education and Training will deliver the course, in association with the ANU, to students from the non-government system?

Mr Barr: The non-government sector, yes.

Dr Bruniges: That is correct.

MRS DUNNE: The contribution paid by individual students from the non-government system to the ANU is?

Dr Bruniges: I have not had that conversation.

Mr Barr: It is \$1,000.

Dr Bruniges: We think it is \$1,000.

Mr Barr: It is \$1,000.

MRS DUNNE: Is that for physics, maths and chem., or is that per subject?

Dr Bruniges: Per subject, we think, but that is a separate memorandum with the ANU.

THE CHAIR: It is not with DET?

Dr Bruniges: No, it is not. It does not come through the government sector. It is that agreement between ANU and non-gov.

MRS DUNNE: Would it be a reasonable rule of thumb that, for any student who participates, irrespective of the sector they come from, the cost somewhere in the system is \$1,000 per student per subject?

Dr Bruniges: I think that is right.

Mr Curry: The arrangement is between the non-government sector and the ANU college, which is a money-making enterprise or business. That arrangement with them on the fee was something we did not participate in. My understanding is that it is \$1,000 per course, but we would have to look that up for you.

MRS DUNNE: Could you tell me—on notice is fine—the number of students who participate in the ANU college, the number of people in each of the subject areas, and how many are in the government system? What is the notional monetary value of the contribution made by the department of education?

Mr Curry: Yes, we can.

Dr Bruniges: Yes, we can.

MR GENTLEMAN: Earlier in this conversation you talked about the cost of higher education, how that is raised and how, going through these particular pathways, through CIT, for example, that can be lessened. Can you tell us the average cost now of a degree? If you are not aware, perhaps you could find out.

MRS DUNNE: That is a question that is outside this minister's responsibility and outside the scope of this report.

MR GENTLEMAN: I wanted to find out how long it takes to pay one off and how much can be saved if you go through the pathways program.

MRS DUNNE: That question really is out of order.

Mr Barr: It depends on the individual course, as there are now differential fees. However, at the CIT level, the fees are significantly less than those that apply at the University of Canberra or at any university.

MRS DUNNE: And they are up front.

Mr Barr: We would have to do some further work on the actual savings, but it would depend on the individual course and the number of credits that that student could get from the CIT that could then be transferred across towards university study. But we can provide some case studies for the committee.

MR GENTLEMAN: That would be good, if you could.

THE CHAIR: Did you have any more questions on output 1, Mr Gentleman?

MR GENTLEMAN: Only some financial questions. I bring you to page 108. In regard to the line under "Expenses for borrowing costs" I see there has been quite a reduction in the budgeted amount and the actual amount for 2006. Was there less borrowing or were you able to achieve a better rate?

Mr Barr: I will refer you to the expert on this one.

Mr Donnelly: The borrowing costs associated with this department's financial statements predominantly relate to finance leases. Where, for example, either a school or the department might lease a computer or a photocopier on a finance lease, we would have to record part of that cost as a borrowing cost. Part of it is the cost of the asset. You also have to amortise the borrowing costs of that.

The reason for the drop between both the actual last year and the budget for 2006 relates to the fact that we had anticipated that the computers-for-teaching lease would be renewed during the 2005-06 financial year. As it turned out, that was not able to be completed in that time. I think it was renewed early in the 2006-07 financial year.

MR GENTLEMAN: It will be reflected in the next annual report?

Mr Donnelly: Yes, you will find in next year's financial statements that the borrowing costs will once again increase.

DR FOSKEY: Because I have not had an opportunity to ask questions, I would like to go back to the chief executive's review.

THE CHAIR: You might need to put them on notice because we have only three-quarters of an hour.

DR FOSKEY: I would really like the opportunity to ask some questions.

MRS DUNNE: It seems reasonable.

THE CHAIR: If you ask one or two, then we will see how we go. We need to get on to output 2.

DR FOSKEY: I am sorry I am out of order, but you will have observed that I have not had the opportunity.

MRS DUNNE: Out of numeric order, not out of order, unlike some other people.

DR FOSKEY: Out of page order.

MRS DUNNE: At least it is about the annual report.

DR FOSKEY: It is a fairly important document that I want to ask about. It is the strategic plan for 2006-09, which is referred to at the bottom of page 7. I have gone to the website. I have got a four-page document. Is this the complete strategic plan?

Dr Bruniges: Yes, it is.

DR FOSKEY: Is there an implementation plan that accompanies it that we could have a look at?

Dr Bruniges: We are in the process of each directorate using the strategic plan to look at business plans for each directorate and the delivery of that. In terms of individual schools and their focus on the Department of Education and Training plan, in terms of that school review process and reflecting that in individual school plans, that will happen in the annual cycle as they go through the review and reflect on that. That will be seen in school plans. The directorates are in the process, following the organisational review, of generating the next step, which is business plans, which will align to the strategic plan.

DR FOSKEY: Business plans for each education area?

Dr Bruniges: Yes. For example, the directorate of curriculum and professional learning in the new organisational structure will have a business plan that links to the strategic plan on the delivery of curriculum and professional learning. There will be some central office business plans. Then for schools, we are expecting each school to go through and use this strategic plan and reflect, in their own individual school plans, how they are working towards the overarching plan.

DR FOSKEY: Will those education area business plans be on the web or otherwise publicly available, and when would that be likely to be?

Dr Bruniges: They are currently working on it. We are still going through the organisational review and finalising each of those directorates as a result of the budget. We have got a process in place. As we get staff on board and work through that process, we hope to be finished by the end of the year. They have already started some of the planning, but I hope that that would be finished and certainly available, in

terms of their deliverables, at the commencement of the school year next year.

DR FOSKEY: How will you be finished by the end of the year, given that the outcome of the 2020 strategy is not to be decided till 13 December? Will that have any impact on your ability to create those business plans?

Dr Bruniges: We will need to take account of government decisions once they occur, and we will need to make adjustments to what we are doing. Part of strategic planning is that the operating context always needs to reflect, and the strategic plan needs to be the overarching document. But we need to have the flexibility within those business plans to reflect any decision or changes of government, or whatever the next budgetary cycle brings, or the one after that. The business units need to be able to reflect that in their operational work.

DR FOSKEY: In regard to the risk management framework that the government has made available on the Treasury website, I am told that in schools there is a very extensive process of risk analysis for events, such as excursions and so on, that are required to be filled in and delivered and reported to the department by each principal. It says, at page 11 of the risk management policy, which is available on the Treasury website, that risk management begins at the highest level. I wonder why schools have to carry out exhaustive risk management analysis for each event, whereas, according to answers to questions that I have asked in the Assembly, the department has been excused from this responsibility for changes, which would seem to be the most far reaching that we have seen in our system since self-government.

Mr Barr: The department has provided the cabinet with such assessments as part of the process. They form part of a cabinet decision-making process. In accordance with ACT government policies and practices, the department has provided the cabinet with such a document.

DR FOSKEY: When was that made available to the cabinet?

Mr Barr: That is a matter that is cabinet-in-confidence. I would not discuss when. Particular papers are made available to the cabinet.

DR FOSKEY: Can those documents be provided to the committee?

Mr Barr: No, because they are subject to ongoing cabinet deliberations and would form the basis of decision making the cabinet will make later. Those documents will eventually become publicly available, but at the moment they retain their cabinet-in-confidence status.

DR FOSKEY: At page 13, it says that individual transition plans were prepared for the students at the Ginninderra district high school, which has now closed. I am interested to know what follow-up has been done with these students and what schools they are now attending. For instance, how many are at Melba high, how many have gone to non-government schools and how well they are performing. That was part of the information you took into the 2020 strategy.

Dr Bruniges: For those individual transition plans, our school directors take a

personal interest in monitoring those students. I have to take on notice the number of students that have accessed different high schools, but I am happy to provide that for you. Our school directors in each of those receiving schools would be speaking to each of the principals to ensure that, if there are any issues, they are aware of them. To my knowledge, none have been brought to my attention with the transitioning of those students.

THE CHAIR: We are going to output class 2 now, which is non-government schools. I have a question about numbers. Figure 3 on page 23 demonstrates that between 2001 and 2006 there has been an increase of 1,752 students attending ACT non-government schools, which represents an increase of 7.64 per cent, if my calculations are correct. Numbers are not my strong suit. I wonder how this compares with other jurisdictions, for instance.

Mr Barr: This trend is occurring across the country. I refer committee members to figure 4 on the following page, which will provide some evidence why this is occurring. Committee members would have observed that the commonwealth government has injected a considerable amount of additional funding into non-government schools. My understanding is that it is of the order of a 160 per cent increase, whilst government schools have received only a 60 per cent increase over the same period. It is clear at a commonwealth government level that a driving element has been the massive additional resources that have been provided to non-government schools, whilst similar resources have not been provided to government schools. I also draw committee members' attention to the fact that throughout this period the ACT government has also provided what I would describe as a much more modest increase to non-government schools.

MRS DUNNE: It is probably the best thing you could say about it, yes, at the most.

Mr Barr: However, given the massive increase in funding from the commonwealth government and the fact that the ACT government is a minor funder, and has always been a minor funder, of non-government schools, we felt that our objective and our particular need is to seek to fill the void where the commonwealth has failed to provide additional funding for government schools over that period. They have left the states and territories to have to meet that funding shortfall. That is obviously difficult for state and territory governments, given the relative budgets of the states and territories vis-a-vis that of the commonwealth.

We are seeing a very deliberate policy at a commonwealth government level to direct funding to non-government schools. We obviously have to respond to that. Given our limited means, our ability to do so on the scale of the commonwealth funding injection to private schools is obviously not there. However, the government has sought to address some of this funding disparity through the injection of \$90 million into upgrades for ACT government schools, the \$20 million IT initiative and the provision of \$67 million for the development of new schools in the ACT where there are areas of high demand.

However, that process would be aided considerably in our ability to invest further in government schools in the ACT by some additional commonwealth assistance. I was very pleased to see that, when the opposition leader announced Labor's policy

particularly to investing in teachers, there was a desire through that policy to work collaboratively with state and territory governments and to provide additional resources to state and territory governments to invest in government education. That is an important direction at the commonwealth level.

As with many of these instances, when one side of politics at a commonwealth level provides an initiative and it is well received, the other side tends to want to pinch it in advance of an election. I am somewhat optimistic, now that federal Labor has indicated that that is a direction that they will pursue in what will be an election year in 2007, we might see from the commonwealth some additional funding. It would be useful if that were not tied again to particular outcomes, as we have seen with the \$90 million that has been made available for chaplains. Whilst any additional funding from the commonwealth is welcomed, the fact that they seek to tie it and make it for exclusive use under their terms, and their terms only, is disappointing but a continuation of an unfortunate trend we have seen over the last decade.

MRS DUNNE: Could I ask a question to be taken on notice? Could the department provide, for those years that are outlined in figure 4 on page 24, the amount of Australian government contributions to government schools in the ACT, for the sake of comparison?

Mr Barr: We can provide that, but in the overall differential, as I have indicated, there has been a 160 per cent increase in funding to non-government schools, with only a 60 per cent increase for government schools over that period.

MR GENTLEMAN: Has there been any explanation for the disparity in funding?

Mr Barr: That is a question that has been raised on a number of occasions. I think it is a very good question. I will not seek to put words into the mouth of the commonwealth minister. It is a question that state and territory education ministers ask regularly at ministerial forums, where we have the opportunity once or twice a year to engage with the commonwealth on these issues. It would be fair to say that the explanations from the commonwealth are not particularly good.

I think it is more an issue of ideology than of seeking to invest in an education system that serves the needs of the majority of the Australian population. It is a great disappointment to all state and territory education ministers that the commonwealth continues this policy of massive additional funding for non-government schools and does not match that funding increase for government schools.

MRS DUNNE: You have said that there have been modest increases in funding to the non-government school sector from the ACT. I think that is absolutely correct. There is essentially a log of claims that the non-government system has in relation to funding from the territory. For the most part, funding from the territory is not of the same proportion as it is in other states.

That log of claims really centres on provision for students with disabilities, for the most part, and IT. There has been some investment in IT. I wanted to ask some questions about the provision of funds for students with disabilities and the approach taken since the introduction of SCAN which, for the most part, has been a substantial

improvement. I think there are areas where we still need to knock out some problems. Turning to the money that is available to students in the non-government system, how is that determined? Is it determined in a way that it is different from that for children in the government system?

Mr Barr: My understanding is that there is no difference but that the difference between the sectors largely occurs around the level of disability and that students with particularly high levels of disability tend to be accommodated and educated in the government system more so than in the non-government system. In terms of the actual assessment process, I will throw to Mr Donnelly.

Mr Donnelly: I can provide a little bit of light on the issue, I hope. In terms of the actual assessment of the students, the students undergo exactly the same instrument.

MRS DUNNE: I am concerned not about the assessment process but about, at the end of the assessment process, how the dollars are allocated to particular children. If those dollars were allocated to a child—no two children are the same and their disabilities are not the same—with a similar level of disability in Miles Franklin primary school compared to St Monica's down the road, do they get different money for the same disability?

Mr Donnelly: Yes, they do. They get different money both from the ACT government and from the federal government. The Australian government has differential funding policies between students with a disability in government schools as opposed to non-government schools. The student would undergo an assessment. Hypothetically, if that assessment generated an additional need of \$10,000 in the non-government sector, that student would receive a proportion. I think it is roughly 30 per cent of that \$10,000.

MRS DUNNE: From the ACT government?

Mr Donnelly: From the ACT government. I am not fully au fait with the exact amount the commonwealth provides for students with a disability, but I believe that between \$3,000 and \$4,000 of funding would come from the commonwealth.

MRS DUNNE: Can I clarify that? Is the \$3,000 or \$4,000 that may come from the commonwealth to that child who accumulated a requirement for \$10,000 of assistance a flat rate?

Mr Donnelly: As I understand it, that is a flat rate. It could be a student with a relatively severe disability or a student with a relatively minor disability, assuming they meet the commonwealth hurdle for being defined as attracting funding. I am sure you are aware that there has been some intense discussion about what happens with any shortfall should the ACT contribution and the commonwealth contribution not come up to the level of the assessed need for that particular child.

MRS DUNNE: Yes. Where are we going with that conversation? What I am leading to is that there is still a shortfall. Where are we with the conversation, minister, about what you do—

Mr Barr: There is further negotiation between the states and territories and the commonwealth in relation to that.

MRS DUNNE: Are those discussions leading to a situation where we might expect to see that, if it is determined that a child has \$10,000 worth of need, the \$10,000 worth of need will be addressed between the two funding governments?

Mr Barr: Clearly the two levels of government have to work. We would need to have further discussions around where there are shortfalls. The issue seems to be around, as Mr Donnelly has outlined, the commonwealth providing a flat amount and the ACT providing a percentage amount. Would I be correct there?

Mr Donnelly: Certainly.

Mr Barr: That is where some of these shortfalls can occur. As I have indicated, the ACT government is a minority funder in the private schools. I think the funding ratios are that in the order of 40 per cent of funds for private schools come from the commonwealth government, another 40 per cent or thereabouts comes from parents and the balance is provided by the ACT government. Those sorts of funding ratios are reasonably well-established. In seeking to meet our contribution, if there were shortfalls we would need to negotiate with the other funding providers for non-government education to address. I would not see that the ACT government, given its minority funding status for non-government schools, would be required to pick up the complete difference.

MRS DUNNE: No, I did not say that. I said: are the negotiations or discussions leading to a position where, if a child is in need of \$10,000 worth of SCAN funding or X number of dollars worth of SCAN funding, the government providers would be making that contribution?

Mr Barr: I do not have a firm answer to that yet. I am not in a position at this point in time to provide you with a definitive answer. I think that, given the nature of the tripartite funding arrangements, it is difficult to see, unless the commonwealth government is going to step in with a large amount of additional resources, that there would be no parental additional money to come in. It is hard to see how that gap can be met without some contribution in terms of the third source of revenue for private schools. However, these conversations, as you have raised, have been going on for some time. I think there is an opportunity for the commonwealth to provide some additional resources in this area. I would certainly welcome that.

Mr Donnelly: The other issue to bear in mind is that, if we take again the hypothetical example where one child in one school needs \$10,000 of additional resources, it is not as if that school has only that one child. The schools will—and I am sure schools in the non-government sector do—allocate their resources to ensure that each child's needs are met. It is not that that particular child is missing out on \$3,000 worth of need. I am sure the school will allocate the resources that that child needs, and take that \$3,000 from elsewhere within its funding.

MRS DUNNE: And therefore not provide some other service.

MR GENTLEMAN: Mr Donnelly, if I bring you to page 109, on the expenses side for 2006 the employee costs almost match the costs for supplies and services in these non-government schools. Perhaps you could compare that with the statement on the previous page for government schools with the employee cost ratio to supplies and services. It appears from this that the cost in non-government schools is almost 10 times the ratio for government schools. I wonder if you could explain why it costs more for supplies and services in this area than in government schools.

Mr Donnelly: The finances for the non-government schools appear in two sections of the annual report. Output class 2 on page 109 outlines the support the department provides to non-government schools in a direct sense. This outlines the staff in the non-government schools office, and the non-government schools' share of administrative expenses, such as administering the ACTAP assessment process and the BSSS year 11 and 12 certification et cetera.

By far the bulk of non-government school funding, though, goes through the territorial statements, which start on page 140. The vast bulk of that \$146 million of grants and purchase services goes to the non-government sector. That includes both the Australian government funding and the ACT government funding. It goes to non-government schools as a grant.

From the department's perspective, we have no particular control over whether a non-government school spends that money on supplies and services or on staffing. I should note that the other major component of that \$146 million is for VET services. That makes up a shade south of \$20 million.

MRS DUNNE: What you are saying is that the \$600,000-odd in the employee expenses on page 109 are for departmental officers, compared to the \$268-odd million of employee expenses on the previous page, which includes teachers.

Mr Donnelly: Precisely.

THE CHAIR: I have a question around home education. On page 25 of the report it mentions an increase in the number of parents that are choosing to educate their young people at home. Do we have any reason why this might be happening?

Dr Bruniges: I looked at that closely too when the report was put together. We have a new piece of legislation. The 2004 Education Act has come into place. I think that has encouraged home-schoolers who are out there to register. There is now a requirement to register with the department under the new act.

THE CHAIR: The registration of it.

Dr Bruniges: Absolutely. In terms of quality assurance, the new act has provided the mechanism by which I believe we are capturing more home-schooling than previously. I would not like to see that happen next year. I think that will be the bulk with the new act coming in. We will see a bit of a plateau effect from here, if my prediction is right.

MRS DUNNE: Is the home-schooling administered out of the office of non-government education or somewhere else?

Dr Bruniges: Yes, it is. It is part of one directorate. Some of the process is there; some of it is delegated to the director, and some of it will come through to me as delegate under the act for different processes.

MRS DUNNE: As part of the accreditation process there is provision for ticking off on what might be loosely called curriculum and syllabus.

Dr Bruniges: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Is there some monitoring of outcomes? For instance, do children who are home-schooled have to participate in, say, ACTAP testing?

Dr Bruniges: In answer to your first question, as part of the new act coming into place we put in a lot of guidelines for the registration of home-schooling, which look at things like the curriculum they must be offering. Part of our monitoring process for registration is to use those guidelines that have been negotiated.

In terms of ACTAP testing, it is the same as for any parents. Parents can elect to have their students sit ACTAP testing or they can elect to have their students not sit. We find that most of them do. As to how many of the 379 that sit ACTAP testing, I would need to look and get back to you. But that is part of the process for everybody.

MRS DUNNE: As part of the monitoring of home-schooling there is no school inspectorate that goes around to schools and says, “Are you complying with meeting the guidelines?” It is all very antiquated and Dick and Dora.

Dr Bruniges: Actually, we have panels that go around and do that.

MRS DUNNE: You have panels that go around and say that the kids in year 3 should be doing this and this—and, yes, they are doing that to a standard which is appropriate. That is done by a panel in the ACT.

Dr Bruniges: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Therefore, is it done for those parents who choose not to participate in the formal education process?

Dr Bruniges: Yes. There are separate guidelines for those that are home-schoolers. Part of that is a panel process for registration. The registration of non-government schools has a cross-sectoral panel where it is like an inspection. They go in and, according to the criteria under the act and the guidelines for the registration of non-government schools, check all of that. Part of that process has been terrific. We work really closely with the non-government sector there. We have teachers from both government and non-government sectors forming those panels. They go in and have a look at the requirements, and the panel will report.

MRS DUNNE: No. We are talking about home-schooling. What do you do?

Dr Bruniges: The same thing. We ask parents to supply, according to the information,

some guidelines. In the first 18 months of the process, the non-government schools office would check each of those criteria and have a look to make sure those things are in place in home-schooling.

THE CHAIR: We will go onto VOCED now.

MR GENTLEMAN: I have another financial question for Mr Donnelly. Perhaps I can bring you to the budget on page 110. On the income side under revenue, there are grants from the commonwealth of \$484,000 in 2005, reducing to \$351,000 in 2006. That is a reduction of \$133,000. Can you tell us why that has occurred?

Mr Donnelly: Not off the top of my head. I might need to take that one on notice, if I may.

Mr Barr: Is it grants? It would appear that there were no grants from the commonwealth.

Mr Donnelly: Indeed.

MR GENTLEMAN: My apologies. There were no grants. It is under “other”.

Mr Donnelly: That is probably why I cannot recall the reason for their dropping.

MR GENTLEMAN: There you go. While there is a difference, perhaps you could answer the other question—the reduction under the line “other”.

Mr Donnelly: I can get that information on notice.

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes, take it on notice.

DR FOSKEY: On page 240 there is a letter from the chair of the Government Schools Education Council. Everyone is aware that the education council wrote a letter to Mr Barr and produced a report in relation to the 2020 proposal. I would have thought council’s response to the budget might be mentioned here and in the annual report. I am interested as to why it was not included in the annual report and in the response made to the council in response to this letter. This is a major community consultation expert and community consultation mechanism of the government and the department. It raises concerns about how real that consultation is, how much it is listened to, and whether its advice is discarded when it does not suit government’s plans.

THE CHAIR: I would have thought that it would not be reported in this particular document because it happened after the event.

DR FOSKEY: The letter was in May. It is in the period of the document.

Mr Barr: I think the letter you are referring to in relation to GSEC’s letter in relation to the budget was in fact in July.

DR FOSKEY: This letter was written on 23 June, which is in the period of the

reporting.

Mr Barr: I do not write the GSEC annual report. That is a matter you could take up with them. I do not know whether or not they recommend. They would not report on every piece of correspondence they write. I believe there is a mention of some of the other correspondence that has been received. To set your mind at rest, I have met with GSEC. We had a long discussion about the issues that were raised in the letter and a number of other issues.

I would refer you to the Education Act—that the minister and the government are not bound to act on every piece of advice from GSEC; nor are we bound to act on every piece of advice from the Non-Government Schools Education Council. They are there to provide advice but, in the context of budget deliberations, we are not bound to fund every initiative GSEC puts forward. We seek their advice, but there is an explicit section in the Education Act that refers to the minister—that, notwithstanding the advice of GSEC, there may be other priorities. In this budget it was not possible to fund every initiative GSEC brought forward. I note for the committee's attention that a number of the initiatives and discussions that GSEC have brought forward have been funded and implemented.

Whilst Dr Foskey might seek to put a particular slant and interpretation on aspects of advice from GSEC that the government does and does not take up, it still remains a matter for government and for cabinet to determine which pieces of advice and which particular initiatives we will implement in any given budget.

DR FOSKEY: In the summary of the GSEC report it says that it contributed to and gave quite extensive advice on the strategic plan for 2006-09. I wonder if the minister or the chief executive could advise me as to what other groups were consulted in the development of the 2006-09 strategic plan?

Dr Bruniges: I am certainly happy to do that. We went into consultation for a period of about 16 months on the development of this strategic plan. I had initial meetings with principals of all schools. We worked with the P&C. We hosted a number of forums of an evening, one which I remember in particular at the Woden school over dinner, where we generated a whole lot of ideas and sought community input into the strategic plan.

We had meetings based in every school; we had written letters to GSEC; we wrote to Non-GSEC and asked for their input—as many stakeholder groups as I can remember. I am happy to supply a list of all of the letters that went out. I found that some of the most rewarding interactions were in fact with those community groups as we brainstormed ideas and worked forward with that.

We also had a number of executive sessions within the department once that input had all come in. We had facilitated a meeting where we spent two full days thinking about the work that went on and the input we had got. It was over quite a long period of time and with a whole range of groups that are invited to give input.

MR GENTLEMAN: Turning to page 27, regarding the Koori preschools, I wondered if you could give us a bit of expansion on what is happening with these sessions and

what has been done to encourage enrolment in the Koori preschools program.

Dr Bruniges: Yes. I think this is a terrific, exciting initiative. With the Koori preschools, we see a group of community workers working individually with parents and families to ensure that they are engaged. We have situations—for example when I last visited Wanniasa—where parents drop in to be connected with those sites and bring their students along. The increase in numbers we have seen in terms of Koori preschool attendance, as in our latest report, really comes from working individually with families on the ground and encouraging parents to use the preschool as, I guess, a connecting site.

The sites that we have the Koori preschools at are Ngunnawal, Wanniasa Hills, Calwell, Narrabundah and Holt, providing ease of access. They operate two days a week from 9.00 am until 1.00 pm. I think that flexibility—in terms of the day that I spent at Wanniasa with parents—was really a time when they came together and talked about the needs. That is encouraging parents to come in and participate in those schools.

I think we have to do some work in looking at the curriculum. Minister Barr previously mentioned the importance of the early years and early intervention. More and more from a research base, we are finding that the earlier we are able to encourage that engagement the better the outcomes are going to be down the line. I would hope that, in the case of our indigenous students, we can use the Koori preschools as the basis for that greater community connection and the early intervention Minister Barr spoke about earlier.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 12.28 pm.